

A Note on the Gardens' Jungle

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THIS IS AN INCIDENT of 35 years ago at which time search was being made for a site that could be used for the proposed University buildings in Singapore, and the Economic Garden has been mentioned. On one afternoon I met in the Economic Garden a friend from Johore who was taking the opportunity of a visit to Singapore to form an independent opinion. So we walked round the Economic Garden together and discussed the subject. It was not difficult to agree that the site, having become surrounded by houses was now a town site with a value greater than that to which it was put as a nursery. But when we returned to the Botanic Garden he dropped a remark which was astounding,—pointing to the Gardens' jungle he recommended that it should be used for houses. It was useless, I found, to point to the beauty of the trees: he could not see it. He grudgingly consented that these as trees added certain species to the display in the Gardens; but could they not be seen in plenty in the forests of the Peninsula? It was quite beyond him to think of one tree helping another to live; are they not competitors; he claimed. At this I gave up my pleading.

Those beautiful trees, mainly of three species of *Shorea*, when they were but seedlings grew in the shade of others and as they surmounted the ground-vegetation of their habitat gradually fitted themselves for drier air and stronger light. Now they are the means of preventing the death of various tender companions and more than that they are the front line in the preservation of the humidity not only of the soil under them, but of the air necessary for the healthy growth of the palms in the Palm Valley.

The Dell at the head of the Gardens' Lake furnishes another illustration of interaction between different items of maintenance within the Gardens' boundaries; or the humidity maintained by the Lake makes the display of the Dell possible.

Any interference with either source of humidity could do more damage than the man in the street can realize.